DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 219 SP 034 296

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TITLE Perceptions of Secondary Student Teaching Experiences. Monograph No. 13.
INSTITUTION Saskatchewan Univ., Saskatoon. Coll. of Education.
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Identification; *Cooperating Teachers; Education Courses; Education Majors; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Predictive Measurement; Preservice Teacher Education; Program Evaluation; Secondary Education; Student Teacher Attitudes; *Student Teacher Evaluation; *Student Teachers; *Teaching (Occupation); *Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT

This study focused on information provided by cooperating teachers and student teachers (N=140) in a 2-week student teaching experience for second year secondary students in the teacher education program at the University of Saskatchewan. The analysis focused on cooperating teachers' comments on the evaluation form; this information is compared to student teachers' perceptions as written in their analysis of the experience. Further analysis reviewed the cooperating teachers' comments on the students potential to become a secondary teacher. The comments included such areas as attitude, initiative, responsibility, maturity of interaction with students and effectiveness of communication. The information collected also indicates the extent to which the three objectives of the student teaching experience were met. The objectives are: (1) to allow students to decide if they wish to continue in education; (2) to allow the College of Education to identify students who should not continue; and (3) to provide experiences which will make third year education courses more meaningful. (Author/LL)

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Abstract

This study focused on information provided by cooperating teachers and student teachers on the two week student teaching experience for second year secondary students in the teacher education program at the University of Saskatchewan. The analysis focused on cooperating teachers comments on the evaluation form and this information is compared to student perceptions of the experience by student teachers as written in their analysis of the experience. Further analysis reviewed the cooperating teachers' comments on the students potential to become a secondary teacher. The comments included such areas as attitude, initiative, responsibility, maturity of interaction with students and effectiveness of communication.

The information collected also indicates the extent to which the three objectives of the student teaching experience were met. The objectives are: (a) to allow students to decide if they wish to continue in education; (b) to allow the College of Education to identify students who should not continue; and, (c) to provide experience which will make third year education courses more meaningful.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS...

Charles Bare is an Assistant to the Coordinator for the Center for School-Based Programs at the University of Saskatchewan. He has been a full-time intern college supervisor for the past nine years. His experiences include fifteen years teaching experience in rural, comprehensive, and urban Saskatchewan school systems. He has also had teaching experience in the Yukon Territory and the state of Nebraska.

Sandra Hill served as a college intern supervisor for several terms. She has served as principal in rural schools as well as vice-principal of Prince Albert Carlton Comprehensive High School.

PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

How do participants in student teaching perceive their experiences? Student teaching 223 is one of the initial two week student teaching experiences in the secondary program that precedes the four month extended practicum or internship at the University of Saskatchewan. Student teachers are in their second year of education and are not to be confused with the four month practicum interns.

The expectations of STTC 223 for supervisors is to provide the student teacher with varied activities related to teaching and classroom teacher related experiences. In addition, student teachers should receive assistance in planning and participation in team-teaching experiences. Constructive feedback on all activities is carried out by student teachers.

Findings of this study included 140 responses from cooperating teachers and student teachers. A questionnaire based on the student teaching evaluation form was administered to both participant groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Teacher Perceptions

Student teacher perceptions were compiled following an analysis of student teacher essays and the two week teaching experience evaluation forms. The following tables represent the positive and negative descriptors by per cent that reflect the student teachers' perceptions of their student teaching experiences.

Table 1.1 illustrates these positive descriptors that appeared for at least twenty-five per cent or more of the time on the evaluation forms.

TABLE 1.1

Positive Descriptors (more than 25%)

Positive Descriptors: Secondary Student Teachers	(%)
Positive Experience	73
Self-Confidence/Realization	61
Practical Learning Opportunity	57
Career Confirmation	47
Observe and Teach	47
Positive Climate	37
Teacher Role	30
Management	29

Seventy-three per cent of the student teachers expressed the view that the student teaching experience was positive. Descriptions which were used by the respondents to convey a positive attitude included: rewarding, enjoyable, valuable, exciting, fun, challenging, informative, profitable, beneficial, great, enlightening, excellent and worthwhile.

Sixty-one per cent of the respondents stated the opinion that the student teaching experience had allowed them time to gain a measure of self-confidence that they could grow and develop into professional teachers. Sixteen respondents specifically cited the fact that during the experience they had gained a self-realization that they could indeed teach.

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents believed the experience was a practical learning opportunity. Some student teachers referred to the experience as an `insight into the real world of teaching'. Seven respondents stated that the

experience was more valuable than any textbook they had read or any education class they had taken. For example, one student stated, "This experience did much more than any textbook ever could. It gave me a first hand look at the real world of teaching and gave me an opportunity to put textbook concepts to use." Another student wrote, "I feel that I have gathered more knowledge and information in teaching within the two weeks of student teaching than I have gathered in my two years at university." Approximately a third of this category spoke of their experience as a general learning opportunity while the remainder gave very specific reasons. They included the following responses describing how they learned:

a. to plan and pace a lesson
b. to teach many subjects
c. to move in the classroom
d. to be enthusiastic in the classroom
e. to be humorous
f. to be flexible in the classroom
g. to correct assignments and make tests
h. to participate in extra-curricular activities
i. to be aware of student needs
j. to get along with people
k. to interact with students

Forty-seven per cent of the respondents believed that the student teaching experience had confirmed their decisions to become professional teachers. One student declared, "This experience has cemented my commitment to be a teacher." Forty-seven per cent of the respondents stated that their experience provided the opportunity to observe a variety of teaching methods, teaching styles, grade levels and subject areas. The experience also had allowed them the opportunity to actually teach a variety of subjects and grade levels as well as to experiment with different

teaching methods.

Thirty-seven per cent of the student teachers identified their experience as having occurred in a positive school climate. These student teachers found the staff, students, and administration to be co-operative, open, trustworthy, friendly, helpful, warm, supporting and willing to give constructive advice.

Thirty per cent of the respondents commented that their experience had taught them the varied role of the professional teacher in an actual school environment. These student teachers frequently referred to the role of the teacher in terms of duties, responsibilities and expectations.

Twenty-nine per cent of the respondents explained that they had learned the significance of classroom management or the necessity to ensure student discipline so that instruction could occur in the classroom. Table 1.2 illustrates those positive descriptors that appeared on the evaluation forms for less than twenty-five per cent of the time.

TABLE 1.2

Positive Descriptors (less than 25%)

Positive Descriptors: Secondary Student Teachers	(%)
Positive Supervision	17
Preparation	16
Positive Rapport	16
Professional Distance	14
School Operation	11
Future	9
Extra-Curricular	8
Fun Factor	8
Satisfaction	8
Needs of Students	8
Rural Insight	8
Professionalism	6
Evaluation	6
Special Education	6

Seventeen per cent of the student teachers indicated that the supervision provided by their cooperating teachers was positive. Respondents referred to their supervising teachers as professional, helpful, role models, co-operative, knowledgeable, open to communication, willing to give feedback and warm.

Sixteen per cent of the respondents stated that they realized the need to be well prepared and organized before they could successfully deliver a lesson to a classroom of students. Others indicated that they had learned how to prepare well organized lesson plans during the experience. Another sixteen per cent of student teachers believed they had successfully developed a positive rapport with their students during the two week teaching experience.

Fourteen per cent of the respondents realized the need to establish a proper professional distance with the students they were teaching. One student teacher commented, "I gradually experienced the shift from wanting to be a student and friend to realizing I was now the teacher." Eleven per cent of the respondents indicated they had learned how a school operates. These respondents frequently referred to gaining a knowledge of the organizational and administrative role of a school system. Nine per cent of the student teachers stated that the experience would have a positive impact on their future development as professional teachers. One student declared, "My student teaching experience will help prepare me for my internship." Eight per cent of the respondents stated the experience had either stimulated their interest in extra-curricular activities or had allowed them to participate in an extra-curricular activity. Eight per cent referred to student teaching as having been a "fun" experience. Eight per cent of the respondents agreed that teaching was a source of self-satisfaction. Eight percent indicated they had learned how to meet the learning needs of their students while another eight per cent of the student teachers expressed the opinion they had gained an appreciation for rural communities. For example, one student wrote, "I like the `small town'

atmosphere." Six per cent of the student teachers indicated the belief that teaching was a profession, and they had learned during their experience the professional role of the teacher. Six per cent indicated they had gained a knowledge of evaluation. Six per cent stated they had experienced an opportunity to teach and work in a special education environment.

Table 1.3 illustrates those negative descriptors that appeared on the evaluation essays.

TABLE 1.3

Negative Descriptors (less than 25%)

Negative Descriptors: Secondary Student Teachers	(%)
Scary/Fear/Nervous	14
Lack of Subject Matter Knowledge	6

Fourteen per cent of the respondents stated that they found the student teaching experience scary. These respondents expressed the view that they were fearful and nervous during their experience.

Six per cent of the student teachers expressed the realization that they lacked the required subject matter knowledge to teach a specific curriculum. There were some miscellaneous negative comments that represented less than one per cent of the respondents. These included:

a. that there were apathetic students.
b. as student teachers they lacked self-confidence.
c. preparing lessons was time-consuming and tiring.
d. coping with students was difficult.
e. there was a need to improve communication skills.

f. there was difficulty in understanding the role expectation.

g. some thought that the evaluation form was unfair.

h. uncertainty regarding teaching as a career choice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cooperating Teacher Perceptions

Similarly the cooperating teacher perceptions were compiled and the following tables represent the positive and negative descriptors by per cent on particular question item responses.

TABLE 1.4

Positive Descriptors (more than 20%)

Positive Descriptors: Secondary Cooperating Teachers	(%)
Good to Excellent Potential to Teach	53
Took Initiative	32
Positive Attitude	32
Accepted Responsibilities	32
Good Rapport	28
Good Interaction	23
Maturity	23

Fifty-three per cent of the cooperating teachers expressed that these two week student teachers all had "good to excellent" potential to teach or at least had potential that would ensure a positive internship experience. Three other sets of descriptors that averaged 32 per cent of the total number of responses were:

a) that student's generally took initiatives to manage, teach and fulfill

requirements;

b) that they either possessed a positive attitude or developed one during the course of the experience towards staff, students and feedback; and,

c) that students generally accepted the responsibilities outlined for them and were not afraid to take on new ones.

Good rapport (28%), good interaction (23%) and maturity (23%) were other descriptors that teachers perceived student teachers demonstrated as teacher characteristics they observed, recorded and in some ways even encouraged.

Table 1.5 indicates the descriptors shared by cooperating teachers that constituted more than 10 per cent of the number of responses but less than 20 per cent

TABLE 1.5

Positive Descriptors (more than 10% and less than 20%)

Positive Descriptors: Secondary Cooperating Teachers	(%)
Enthusiasm	19
Professionalism	18
Communication Skills	17
Friendliness	17
Confidence	15
Success in a One-to-One Teaching Situation	12
Planning and Structuring	12
Presentation	12
Teaching Aids	11
Gained Student Respect	11

It appears that personality and sociability factors were high in terms of teacher evaluation of student teaching performances. Enthusiasm (19%), professionalism (18%), communication skills (17%), friendliness (17%) and confidence (15%) seem to suggest that although these characteristics were not general to the population they were deemed to be desirable. Some student teachers handled the one-to-one teaching situation well (12%) while others needed to work on planning and structuring behaviours (12%) as well as presentation (12%) skills. Employing effective teaching aids (11%) and gaining student respect (11%) were slightly lesser importance.

Descriptors that were not perceived as being necessary and occurred in less than 10 per cent of the responses were that student teachers were knowledgeable (6.4%), possessed classroom management skills (6.4%), were well-organized (6.4%), helpful (5.0%) or demonstrated a strong desire to learn (5.0%).

Table 1.6 illustrates the negative descriptors that were directly or indirectly volunteered.

TABLE 1.6

Negative Descriptors (less than 10%)

Negative Descriptors: Secondary Cooperating Teachers	(%)
Generally Lacked Knowledge	6.4
Management Problems	6.4
Not Well-Organized	6.4
Could be more Helpful	5.0
Need Stronger Desire to Learn	5.0

These percentage results indicated that either these descriptors were not

observed as negative characteristics or very few of the 140 students displayed inadequacies in these areas.

Statistically the comments given were not highly correlated. In a general synopsis most of the supervisors believed that the student teachers were successful in their student teaching and would likely be good teachers. Consciously or subconsciously the teachers created sets of criteria for acceptance into the profession. The criteria appeared to be environmental checklists that attest to individuals' personalities and sense of social acceptability with all participants involved in the experience--staff, administration, pupils and community.

It appears then that teachers are generally satisfied with the "nature" of the kinds of students whom they receive as student teachers. They do not appear to evaluate or judge this interim group based on their teaching skills or expertise at this point in their training. Three or four teachers suggested idiosyncrasies related to personalities such as obsessive smoking, tendency to dominate or not being good listeners could interfere with success in the future. One principal wrote an additional evaluation that suggested that a particular student was not suited to the profession nor would she be unless she changed radically. The cooperating teacher's comment did not address concerns of that nature.

Cooperating Teacher Comments Compared To Student Teacher Perceptions

Positive correlations appear to exist for shared descriptors. Those descriptors are; the nature of the positive experience (73% for student teachers and 32% for supervising respectively), self-confidence/realization (61%) as compared to willing to take initiative 32%), accept responsibility (32%) and maturity (23%).

Forty-seven per cent of the student teachers expressed that the experience confirmed the career choices which paralleled the notion that 53% of their supervisors described their success on a continuum of good to excellent potential to teach (53%).

Thirty-seven per cent of the student teachers felt they had been placed or nurtured in a positive climate while their supervisors felt that 28% of them developed good rapport within school and community environments.

Success Of Program Objectives

The descriptive information collected from secondary student teaching evaluation forms has been analyzed to determine the extent to which the three objectives of the secondary student teaching experience are being achieved. The three objectives of the secondary student teaching experience at the University of Saskatchewan are:

(a) to allow students to decide if they wish to continue in education;

(b) to allow the college to identify students who should not continue; and,

(c) to provide experiences which will make third year education courses more meaningful.

The research analysis indicated that seventy-three per cent of the student teachers found the experience to be rewarding. Sixty-one per cent stated they had developed self-confidence during the experience while fifty-seven per cent found the experience to be a positive practical learning opportunity. Forty-seven per cent found the experience a positive opportunity to observe and actually teach. These indicators imply that these student teachers have chosen to continue to pursue the teaching profession with considerable enthusiasm.

Almost fifty per cent of the respondents expressed the view that their student teaching experience had confirmed their decision to become professional teachers. This indicates that almost one of every two students explicitly made a positive confirmation to continue to pursue their teaching career. On the other hand, less than one per cent stated that the experience had left any question in their mind whether they should continue in the college of education.

It appears that the first objective of the secondary student teacher program,

i.e., to allow students to decide if they wish to continue in the College of Education, is being reasonably met by the secondary student teaching experience.

The second objective of the program is to allow the college to identify students who should not continue. The evidence supports the idea that virtually 99% of all student teachers indicated that they wanted to be teachers to greater or lesser degrees and their supervisors supported those claims. Since the four month internship failure rate is 6 to 10 per cent, it would appear that the secondary teacher screening is not evident during this practicum experience. Therefore, the authors believe there could be two conclusions resulting from the data or descriptions. One, the student teaching experience is too short in duration to identify serious problems relating to teaching. Two, in light of the fact that supervisors appear to be focusing on sociability and personality factors rather than specific teaching skills the success rate in student teaching is exceptionally high.

The third objective is to provide experiences which will make third year education courses more meaningful. The positive practical experience expressed by the student teachers seems to suggest that the third year courses should be more meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Findings indicated that most student teachers perceived their experiences positively. A relatively small proportion felt inadequately prepared in terms of the teaching process or knowledge background about the subject. These views were expressed even though it was also felt that campus courses could be more meaningful. This contradictory finding between perceptions of actual teaching experiences and coursework needs further research.

Feelings toward the quality of supervision was positive. Also, cooperating teachers were positive about the quality of their student teachers and the overall program.

The brevity of the two-week period and its tendency to emphasize sociability and personality aspects in teaching appear to be inadequate in serving as a screening device to identify those student teachers who may not be suited for internship or a teaching career. A potential research project needs to focus on determining differences in the assessment of teaching between the student teaching and internship programs.